

New Freedom for the 21st Century

In the twenty-first century in Alabama, people with disabilities greatly contribute to the job market. Many people with disabilities have high goals and expectations just like anyone else. They wish to succeed despite what obstacles may await them. People with disabilities are extremely strong and dedicated human beings. However, some people may not know what excellent knowledge people with disabilities can contribute. In order to fully understand talents people with disabilities can bring to the job market requires a knowledge of local accommodations and people with disabilities in the community.

In Huntsville and its surrounding areas, many excellent accommodations have been made to assist these individuals. For instance, while I was at Madison Square Mall this past weekend, I noticed a wheelchair user going downstairs in the elevator. Malls have not always had elevators for wheelchair users, making it difficult for them to travel the entire mall. Also, many more wheelchair ramps are available in the community. I have observed that many of the places I go, such as Redstone Federal Credit Union, Madison Post Office, and Wal-Mart Supercenter, have installed doors, bathrooms, closer parking spaces, and wheelchair ramps for people with disabilities. This is a very good implementation because it makes wheelchair users feel more equal and accepted in society. Another outstanding contribution in the community has been the Special Olympics, which encourages people with disabilities to reach their full potential. Several of the organizations at Butler High School have taken part in the Special Olympics each year. In addition to these accommodations, colleges have also realized the importance of having people with disabilities admitted to colleges and universities. Scholarships may be awarded to people with disabilities to also encourage them to reach their full potential. Many talented people have had disabilities and still managed to become extremely successful such as Leonardo da Vinci,

Tom Cruise, Ray Charles, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Ernest Hemingway. These are just a few of the thousands of famous people with some type of disability.

Recently, I met a very nice man at my little brother's baseball game. He was there watching his grandson and enjoying the game. I noticed he walked with braces and inquired if I could ask him a few questions for my scholarship essay. He readily agreed. This man's name is Phil Richards; he is fifty-eight years old, and works as a mechanical engineer at SCI Systems, Incorporated. When I asked Mr. Richards about his disability, he explained to me what had happened, "When I was younger, my parents did not, for religious reasons, believe in inoculations. Therefore, I got polio when I was four and have had many problems because of it." This man is extremely courageous and emphasizes the fact that polio has made him a stronger person. He was made fun of as a child, but worked hard at his studies, received a scholarship from the University of Alabama in Huntsville, and began working as a mechanical engineer at SCI Systems, Incorporated. He has a wife and two sons. Mr. Richards feels that Alabama has made great progress toward making sufficient accommodations for people with disabilities. He had great difficulty driving and was totally unable to drive for many years. However, with new technology, Mr. Richards is excited to say that he was able to get his car tailored to fit his needs. He did not go into great detail about this, but he described it as "fascinating."

Another individual with a disability is my second cousin Tim Steele. He and his mother have been living in this area for about twenty years. Mr. Steele has had great strength and ambition during the course of his life. He is thirty-seven years old and works part-time jobs such as telemarketing and selling Avon, candles, and Tupperware. Mr. Steele has muscular dystrophy and cerebral palsy, and he is confined to a wheelchair. He is a very nice, sweet man who deserves the best he can possibly receive. Even though he lives with his mother to help take care

of him, Mr. Steele is fully capable of taking care of himself. Even though people have not always been the nicest to him, he does not hold any grudges. Mr. Steele also feels that the community has come a long way in taking people with disabilities into consideration. When I asked him what his greatest goal was, he replied, "I would like to be a pastor one day and live a life of helping others." He has completed his education through high school and wished to attend college. He received a full scholarship from Calhoun Community College, but he did not have the transportation to get there. Now he is thirty-seven, but still would like to start college and pursue his dreams. Mr. Steele says he will, but dreams take time.

In conclusion, a great deal of new freedom exists for the twenty-first century. Many more jobs and opportunities are made available for people with disabilities each day. Society has come a long way in providing sufficient accommodations for these individuals, and the accommodations can only get better. Mr. Richards and Mr. Steele are just two people out of many with high goals and expectations. Hopefully, with the excellent improvements that have already been made, many more people with disabilities will come forward, achieve their goals, and bring their wonderful talents to the job market in the years to come.